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Editorial: Auditor General should conduct performance audit of No Worker Left Behind

By **The Grand Rapids Press Editorial Board**

December 29, 2009, 9:20AM

A request from Sen. Nancy Cassis, R-Novi, for the Office of the Auditor General to review the No Worker Left Behind (NWLB) program is both reasonable and necessary. Given that the state unemployment rate is 14.7 percent, and the program is funded through federal and some state dollars, an independent review of its effectiveness and efficiency is more than appropriate.

Performance audits should be welcomed, not feared. They can be an invaluable management tool to determine what is working as intended and what is not. The NWLB program was created in 2007 to educate and train laid-off workers for 21st century jobs. The program provides up to \$10,000 for two years' worth of education for workers studying toward a degree or certificate in areas supposedly of high demand.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has touted its success on national news shows and in her State of the State addresses. Ms. Granholm said an outcomes report, released in October by the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG), "shows the program was producing results by helping tens of thousands gain or retain jobs." The report covered the first 18 months, Aug. 1, 2007 through Feb. 28 of this year.

Ms. Cassis is not the first person to question the tracking of jobs, accuracy of numbers and accessibility of classes in the program. A July 5 New York Times article only raised more questions about the program's effectiveness. But taxpayer funded programs should be able to stand up to the scrutiny of an independent, nonpartisan performance review, or risk their credibility.

A performance audit would determine if the worker program is achieving the desired results, and if money is spent efficiently and effectively.

Most of the funding comes from the federal government. In 2008, the first year of the program, the Legislature did not provide the \$40 million Ms. Granholm wanted to complement \$37 million in federal aid. But in 2008 lawmakers agreed to \$7.1 million. This fiscal year, \$4.5 million is allocated to supplement the continued federal aid of varying amounts.

According to the state, 62,206 people were enrolled in training the first 18 months of the program, and 34,355 completed it. Of those who made it through, 72 percent, or 24,699, either obtained or retained jobs. Another 9,656 were still looking.

The earliest the auditor's office could begin conducting a review is in March, in part because of mandated obligations. Ms. Cassis has asked for the performance audit to include eight things, including the following:

Evaluate the effectiveness of NWLB in ensuring participants secure long-term employment six months, 12 months and 24 months after training.

Evaluate the efficiency of NWLB in processing participants from initial application to training completion.

Evaluate the effectiveness of management processes and procedures in

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